

# **OLD TRAILS AND NEW**

**A Reading Course on  
Indian Americans**

**BY  
HUGH LATIMER BURLESON**









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## OLD TRAILS AND NEW

**A** EDWARD NEWTON in an essay, *The Course of Empire*, which appeared in the Atlantic Monthly for September, 1932, gives a pleasing description of a trip taken through the far West, in the course of which the author, while visiting Santa Fe, New Mexico, encounters Indians for the first time in sixty years. Doubtless they were the variety which one sees at railway stations and on the outskirts of white communities. As the result of his observation Mr. Newton casually remarks:

“To me the Indian appears to be a dirty, lazy, and ugly creature, and I believe his reputation for treachery is deserved. He may be none of these things, but I well remember when, in the Centennial year, the news of the defeat and destruction of Custer and his gallant little army by the Sioux confirmed the generally held belief that the only good Indian is a dead Indian”.

Such a statement indicates how little accurate knowledge and how much inaccurate information the white man possesses concerning the American Indian, his quality and character, his past and his future. There is probably no single figure in our American life which has called forth more varieties of opinion. He stood at the door-way of the new world when it opened to us. He appeared in the background of every advance of the pioneer, and his presence was marked with lurid

emphasis upon various stages of our progress as a Nation.

It is true that we appropriated the Indian's land, and in the process of creating our Nation we destroyed his world. Yet wholesale denunciation of the white race for what has happened to the Indian in our national history, is hardly just. The urge which brought our forefathers across the Atlantic and made them pilgrims in a new land was not utterly selfish. There is something nobly courageous in the spirit of the pioneer, though no doubt he sometimes indentified God's purpose with his own advancement. It was hardly to be expected that large areas of the earth should be excluded from the impact and influence of more adequate civilization. It may be that what happened to the Indian in this land will make for the eventual welfare of mankind as a whole. Yet this does not obviate, and it does little to mitigate, the reproach which lies upon us for our treatment of the Indian in the past and the present.

It will be interesting, therefore, to know something more definite about these people whom we found here—their characteristics, habits, and ideals, the background of their social living and their reactions toward the civilization represented by our forefathers. There was something truly noble in those Indian leaders of the past who stood in the waning day of their race, against the far horizon, as champions of their people and protagonists of a passing order.

In addition to making acquaintance with such per-



sonalities this reading course will help you to look into the soul of the Indian and to understand his way of life—so concrete, so natural, and yet so touched with artistry and vision. If, for the moment, we can forget red faces, war-bonnets and tomahawks, we shall find much to admire and approve in the Indian attitude toward life. He will appear as a being very much like ourselves, though more directly affected by his intimate contacts with nature, and living, perhaps, more nearly in harmony with the great forces of the universe. Particularly shall we be impressed and even surprised, by the artistry and spiritual capacity manifested in these primitive people, and by the place which religion (crude though it might be in its manifestations) held in their scheme of life.

But most of all we shall want to know their present condition and immediate needs, that we may learn how best to help them. Fortunately there is much to offer along this line. It is encouraging to feel that at last there is a dawning consciousness of responsibility for the welfare of this race; indeed, there has never been a time when the white race as a whole, and our Government as responsible for these wards of the past, were more desirous to treat them fairly, to plan for them adequately, and to give them a chance to take their place in the ranks of our citizenship.

Always there have been those, both among the officials of the Government and in the membership of the

Christian Church, who have felt keen interest and sympathy for this proud race of primitive people. But until recently there has been no thorough-going program based on effective study and adapted to their needs. It was the beginning of a new day for the Indian race when, in 1926, under Hubert Work, then Secretary of the Interior, the Institute of Government Research was directed to undertake a thorough survey of the Indian problem. A volume of eight hundred and fifty pages appeared in 1928 under the title *The Problem of Indian Administration*, which has become a source of accurate information and the basis upon which the administration of Indian affairs has gone forward.

At last we are taking seriously and are trying to discharge effectively our undoubted responsibility for the welfare of the Indian people — a responsibility which rests not solely nor chiefly upon the fact that the wealth and power of America are built upon those possessions of which we deprived him, but because he has within himself qualities and characteristics which make his race a distinct asset to our citizenship.

It will be the aim of this reading course to present the Indian of today against the background of his past, and to help the reader to evaluate him more sympathetically, particularly at this critical time when he is passing out of an old environment and seeking to take his place in the world which now is, and that which is to be.

Let us begin our course with a recent book which is both adequate and vivid. *Wah'Kon-Tah*, by John Joseph Mathews, is in some

WAH'KON-TAH  
(Divine Mysteries)

By  
John Joseph Mathews

ways the most significant recent contribution which has been made to the study of Indian life and character. The book was, in fact, the Book-of-the-Month for November, 1932. The author, though he keeps himself quite in the background, is an interesting person. Himself a member of the Osage tribe through the marriage of his great-grandfather with an Osage woman, he was born in Pawhuska, Oklahoma, in the old home adjoining the Osage agency. After graduating at the University of Oklahoma he spent three and one-half years in Merton College, Oxford, England, where he took a degree in natural science. He was an aviator in the World War, but finally returned to live among his own people. There he found, still living and laboring, a unique personality who had been the friend of his boyhood, and whom he has made the central figure of his book.

Major Laban J. Miles, a kindly, patient and wise Quaker, became Indian agent among the Osages in 1878 and continued to serve in that capacity until his death in 1931. He was the uncle of President Hoover, who spent some years of his youth with him on the Osage reservation. During the long years of his service Major



Miles kept a journal in which he recorded his memories and impressions. At his death this passed into the hands of the author, and Mr. Mathews has wisely chosen to present the story of the Osages as seen through the eyes of this life-long friend.

The strange title of the book is difficult of definition. *Wah'Kon-Tah* means the spiritual or divine realities, and is explained as "that which the children of the earth do not comprehend as they travel the roads of the earth, and which becomes clear to them only when they have passed on to the great mysteries". In the large sense of the word, it means — Religion.

Yet the book is practical rather than mystical. From the first chapter one feels the atmosphere of wide spaces and the background of a primitive race. He may be a little disappointed that there is not more of blood and fighting, for *Wah'Kon-Tah*, is a chronicle of the inner life and thought of a people among whom the interesting figure of the Major moves about, meeting the problems of a period which brought into the lives of the Indians more difficulties and dangers than any other through which they had passed,—white men pushing ruthlessly into the new territory, old Indian enemies raiding from time to time, the temptations of sudden wealth, the adjustment of a primitive people to a complex civilization. Amid all these the Major goes, settling disputes, advising in difficulties, arranging marriages, counseling the young and old, until gradually, by simply being a friend to the

people under his charge and endeavoring to think their thoughts with them, he becomes as one of themselves, honored and beloved, and is able to interpret them for us as few white men have ever done. This volume portrays the Indian as a human being, yet retains that flavor of picturesqueness and of racial definition which have always made him an appealing figure of mystery and romance.

Of this book, Henry Seidel Canby fittingly says: "There has been no book quite like this about the Indians, or for that matter about the end of the epic age on the great plains. It is based upon the recorded memories of a white man who came to admire his Indian friends, Big Chief, Hard Robe and the rest, more than any other men in the world, and who, in his Quaker silences, seems to have come closer to the Indian nature than any other friend of the Indians. It is written modestly, with white blood and a civilized education, but devotedly intent upon reproducing with the Major's help a lost world of men and imagination."

The book ends in disillusionment and disappointment. It shows the sons of the Osages, made rich by the oil that had flowed unsuspected beneath their reservation, yet not knowing how to use their riches, purchasing expensive nothings to dissipate dollars which they have not earned, dashing about in expensive automobiles which they do not understand, imitation white men, who have lost all knowledge of Wah'Kon-Tah.

Yet it must be remembered that these Osages are only a small portion of the Indian race. Few Indians have experienced so spectacular a history, or have had placed in their hands that most delicate and dangerous of modern resources — the power of wealth. The vast majority of the race are pathetically poor — some even tragically destitute. We should gain no true perspective if we closed our investigation with the reading of this volume. It will have been valuable in giving us a sympathetic understanding of the background of Indian thought and life under the conditions of an earlier day, but we shall feel the need of obtaining a picture of the whole Indian people, and of the various experiences through which they have passed in their years of contact with the white race. Such a view has been presented by several competent authorities, but never, perhaps, more satisfactorily than in the second book to which we now turn.

THE STORY OF  
THE REDMAN

*By*  
Flora Warren Seymour

The author, Mrs. Seymour, is a member of the Board of Indian Commissioners, that fine nonpartisan group of distinguished and devoted men and women, appointed by the President, who have concerned themselves with the welfare of the Indian people, and who, through official connection with the Government, have been able to study and serve this race as no other group can do. With such a background



of experience Mrs. Seymour, in *The Story of the Redman* has produced an admirable and vivid treatise on the whole history of the Indian race in our country. Beginning with the arrival of the first white-sailed ships upon the Atlantic shore, it passes from period to period with cumulative interest. You will find in their proper setting many great Indian figures, and the well-chosen illustrations and maps add materially to the value of the work. First published in 1929, it is the most modern and authentic of any treatise on the redman which is now available. The author's intimate knowledge of her subject is evident on every page, and her method of treatment and literary style make the reading of the book a pleasure.

Mrs. Seymour has done much more than write a book about Indians. She has supplied rich material to fill a blank page in American history; for the Indian's part in the development of our land had never been adequately described. For better or for worse we found him here, and his presence influenced the course of our history. Sometimes counted as an asset, sometimes as an obstacle, we encountered him; but most of the time, unless he made himself a nuisance, we forgot him. It surely makes for a more balanced understanding of our national life, that we have an adequate and intelligent story of that central figure who was the original American. Few of us realize to what an extent our forefathers, newcomers in this land, absorbed and adapted

the Indian culture. We should create a great void if we were to strike from our history and geography all that pertains to his race. To him we owe much in painting, sculpture and decorative art, and from him we received such things as corn and tobacco, quinine and coca, the potato and the squash, and other good creatures of the earth.

Only by some comprehensive study shall we do justice to a race which, though thrust aside in the ruthless march of progress, furnished cultural values too significant and important to be obliterated. For much more than the acres of which we dispossessed him we still remain the Indian's debtor.

RAMONA By Helen Hunt Jackson
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Having endeavored, in the reading of Mrs. Seymour's *Story of the Redman*, to achieve an adequate understanding of this widely-scattered race, who, through our predecessors in this land, have remained on suffrance, let us turn next to a book of a different type — a thrilling and appealing story which is one of the few classics in the literature which concerns the redman,— Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona*. Perhaps you read it in the days of your youth, but if so take it up again and read it in the light of today.

The book was written by an enthusiast — one might almost say a fanatic. In her *Century of Dishonor* Mrs. Jackson had already poured out her indignation and had



recorded her sense of shame at the treatment accorded the Indian — particularly in California. Out of such a ferment of soul great books have been born. One thinks particularly of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and its enormous influence upon the Civil War. *Ramona* is only a little less picturesque and appealing. It is the cry of human suffering against human injustice and greed, to which sensitive consciences must always respond.

In reading this noble appeal in behalf of an injured and dispossessed race it is only fair that we remember two facts which conspired to make the situation of the California Indian particularly unfortunate; for it is sadly true that nowhere has the Indian been more ruthlessly ignored. The first cause was that wonderful line of Franciscan Missions extending from the Mexican border to San Francisco, which is one of the historic glories of California, but was to prove so disastrous to the Indians whom it was designed to serve. Following an age-long practice the Indians were detached from their normal habitat and settled in patriarchal fashion about the missions, utterly dependent upon them for maintenance and life. With the downfall of the missions vast numbers were left destitute and helpless, unable to return to the lands whence they had come and without a foothold in the land of their fathers. The second unfortunate fact was the discovery of gold, just after sovereignty in California passed from Mexico to the United States. Whatever disposition there may have

been to restore the Indian to the land, vanished when the fear emerged that any such grant of land meant the possible loss of gold deposits. For long years the California Indian was an outcast and a pariah, and only in recent times has there been an earnest attempt to redress his wrongs by giving him a spot for a home and protection against oppression. Let us hope that in the more intelligent and sympathetic atmosphere of today the protest voiced in *Ramona* is having its effect.

THE SOUL OF  
THE INDIAN

By  
Charles A. Eastman

From Mrs. Jackson's colorful story, it is a logical step by which we pass to consider those inner thoughts and feelings upon which

rest the foundations of Indian character. Fortunately it is an Indian who seeks to interpret for us the soul of his people. Charles A. Eastman, a Santee Sioux and a graduate of Dartmouth College, the author of *The Soul of the Indian*, is an outstanding example of the possibilities of the Indian race and combines the background of the Indian with the best cultural values of a modern education.

I know of no place where there is gathered in so small a compass and by so competent an authority, an explanation of the inner life of the Indian people, of their attitude toward God, nature and society. Those who read it will be impressed by the simplicity and sincerity which it manifests, and it may well arouse ques-

tioning whether in some respects our moral sanctions and social principles, even though we call them Christian, are greatly superior to those of the Indian.

Chapter two, which is rather inadequately entitled "The Family Altar", deals really with the whole question of the home and the family. Many will be surprised to discover the position there assigned to woman, and the estimation in which she is held. It is a total misunderstanding to suppose that the Indian woman, whom we seem to delight in calling a "squaw", is a down-trodden person, altogether under the domination of man. As a matter of fact, in many Indian tribes she holds an importance greater than among ourselves, descent and inheritance being traced through the mother instead of through the father.

The chapters dealing with Ceremonial Worship and the Moral Code are also most enlightening. In chapter five Dr. Eastman tells of the religious traditions of the Sioux Indians, and in chapter six describes their attitude toward the spirit world. These complete a picture of the soul of the Indian which though brief is vivid, and will leave the reader with a new understanding and larger respect for his red brother of the plains.



LIFE AND LABORS OF  
BISHOP HARE  
By  
M. A. DeWolfe Howe

From this interpretation of those inner convictions, those thoughts and feelings, faiths and hopes which lie at the basis of the Indian character, we invite you to make acquaintance with one who looked deeply and lovingly, through a long life devoted to his service, into the soul of the Indian.

It is one of the significant facts of our day that no type of literature is commanding more attention or securing a larger reading than biography. We find ourselves better able to understand and appreciate events and epochs, trends of thought and purpose, as we see them exemplified in a life. Through the eyes of men who walked among them and had a part in them we see more clearly the true meaning of human movements when history is wrapped up in personality.

M. A. DeWolfe Howe was a pioneer in this form of literature, and perhaps the leading exponent of American biographical writing. It is our good fortune that one of his early productions was *The Life and Labors* of his great relative, William Hobart Hare, Bishop of Niobrara. Perhaps his later success in this field was influenced by this choice, for it was a life of such heroism and consecration as to inspire all who came into contact with it. And it was bound up with the Indian race. Sent to save and serve a scattered and barbarous people in the darkest days of their history, Bishop Hare

fulfilled his mission so gloriously that his name stands foremost among those who have been leaders and champions of the Indian.

The record which he left at the end of thirty-seven years among them is cause for pride throughout the Church and the Nation; and for sincere gratitude to the God whom he served. He found the Dakotas bewildered and embittered, largely pagan and without hope for the future; he left them almost completely Christian, with light in their eyes and hope in their hearts, because he and his devoted helpers had shown them what life in Jesus Christ may mean to the humblest, and how men may be led of Him into the fellowship of the sons of God.

This life is not solely a story of Indian missions. Bishop Hare served and was beloved by both races, and it is no small part of his success that he was able to discourage race antagonisms and to bind both together in the Household of the Faith. Yet it was for his ministry to the Indian that he will be most conspicuously honored and remembered.

On the pages of Christian missions there are few achievements such as his, but the miracle was wrought, "not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts". This is the life-story of a saint and hero, who counted it joy to serve, in his Master's Name, the humblest and the most hopeless of his brethren.

**INDIAN AMERICANS***By*

Winifred Hulbert

The objective once seen by Bishop Hare on the far horizon is now near at hand. The Indians of the United States are approaching a definite climax in their history which will involve integration with the life of the Nation. Especially the younger among them are seeking adjustment with and a worthy place in the white man's social structure. Much remains to be done for and with them, but the hope of the future lies in the impulses and ambitions which are throbbing in the hearts of those boys and girls of many tribes and languages who now find their contacts in the Government or public school, and whose medium of communication is the English tongue. With them rests the future leadership of their people.

Therefore the last book offered in this reading course deals with Indian youth, and its title *Indian Americans* is especially significant. Heretofore we have thought of them as American Indians, an isolated and unadjusted group in our national household, who were only likely to become Americans by loss of their identity as Indians. A significant change of accent is appearing. White men on the one side are giving more generous and appreciative consideration to the Indian in his racial identity, and there is being restored to the Indian a measure of pride in his own race, and of hope for its future. This is voiced in the book which Miss Hulbert has written, and



it is a valuable contribution to Indian literature, in that it approaches the subject from the standpoint of the young Indian, seeking to understand his aspirations and struggles and to indicate the difficulties and opportunities which lie before him.

*Indian Americans* has a distinctly literary quality and a pleasing style which makes it easy and interesting reading. In one respect it differs materially from the other books of the course, namely, that the writer presents the subject with the reactions of a recent observer. She has not lived intimately among Indians, but brings to her task an unusual experience in the way of contacts. She went forth to discover what the young Indian-American was doing and thinking, and she presents with great sympathy and understanding the results of a long journey from coast to coast which was undertaken for the distinct purpose of producing this volume. Its conclusions are, therefore, in a certain way more valuable because more widely diffused than would be possible in the case of persons who have ministered only to a single tribe.

To an unusual degree Miss Hulbert has interpreted the Indian as one who sees him with new eyes. Those of us who have known him for a life-time are again reminded through her of the artistic quality of these people who ornament and make beautiful even the commonplace things used in daily life, and the urge to some form of religious expression which prevails so widely among them. Her final chapter on the Indian's approach

to God as exemplified in the Person of Christ is particularly discriminating.

Thus our course of study, which began with the Osage passing out of his old environment into the dangers and degradations involved in adjustment to our form of civilization, closes upon a hopeful note as we see the young Indian looking forward and feeling his way towards a place in the sun and an opportunity to develop as an Indian-American.

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So ends our excursion into Indian literature. We wish it might have taken you a longer journey, for there are many other fascinating vistas to be explored, and books are constantly issuing which deal with some feature of Indian life. We should have liked to show you the splendid Navajos and the interesting Hopis of the Southwest, the friends of Bishop Rowe in Alaska, and many others scattered throughout the Nation. But perhaps the interest aroused by that which you have read may encourage you to find your own way into further fields where primitive Americans no less appealing await you, and will reward your search.



## BOOKS RECOMMENDED IN THIS COURSE

WAH'KON-TAH (Divine Mysteries)

*John Joseph Mathews*

University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Okla. 1932. \$2.50.

THE STORY OF THE REDMAN . . . *Flora Warren Seymour*

Longmans, Green and Company, N. Y. 1929. \$5.00.

RAMONA . . . . . *Helen Hunt Jackson*

Little, Brown & Co., Boston. 1931. \$2.50.

THE SOUL OF THE INDIAN . . . . . *Charles A. Eastman*

Houghton Mifflin Company, N. Y. 1911. \$1.50

THE LIFE AND LABORS OF BISHOP HARE

*M. A. DeWolfe Howe*

Macmillan, N. Y. 1912. \$1.00.

INDIAN AMERICANS . . . . . *Winifred Hulbert*

Friendship Press, N. Y. 1932. Cloth \$1; paper 60 cents.

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